



Memo To: House Finance Committee
From: Kelly Nevins, CEO, Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Date: April 8 2021
Concerns: Support for Budget Article 13, Section 6 and H5672

The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research and strategic partnership designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. ***WFRI supports budget article 13, Section 6 and bill H5672, both of which increase the state funding rate for childcare assistance.***

Childcare is an essential workforce support, making it not just a family issue, but a core economic issue for both workers and employers. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only exploited the fragility of the U.S. market-based child care industry, but has also shone a spotlight on how racism and sexism endure when built into policies and systems that touch our everyday lives. By following the wisdom of local voices that are centering marginalized genders in communities of color, we can create policies that advance a fair and equitable recovery for all.

During a typical year, employers lose about \$13 billion in potential earnings, productivity, and revenue due to inadequate child-care resources (Council for a Strong America). The pandemic forced 11 million women out of their jobs in just four months, leaving many with the choice of staying home to care for their children or seeking out childcare centers to continue as essential workers. The early care and education sector has a majority-women workforce, approximately 40% of whom are women of color. Despite the exponential benefits their work provides to society and the economy, decades of underinvestment led the child care industry to the brink of collapse even before COVID-19 struck. The pandemic has simply provided the final push.

Consider:

- 3 in 4 private child care providers have closed during the pandemic, heavily impacting a RI industry where nearly 100% of the businesses are female owned and operated
- 76% of parents reporting needing to stay home and not work due to childcare were female, compared with 24% who were male
- 8 in 10 families can't afford the full cost of high quality infant and toddler care; this disparity is even higher for families of color at 94%

Getting women back to work requires building the care infrastructure that we have always needed. Investments in Rhode Island's childcare system are critical to building back to a better normal. Support of the budget article and H5672 will permanently increase CCAP rates to meet or exceed the federal equal access standard, provide weekly infant care bonuses, cap family copayments at 7% of families income (the federal

affordability standard) and will allow more low-income working families to qualify for a CCAP certificate.

We urge your support of this article and bill.